

“Schubertiana”

by Tomas Tranströmer. (Trans. [Kalle Räisänen](#))

I.

In the evening-dark of a place outside New York, a look-out point
where one glance can encompass eight million people’s homes.
The giant city over there is a long, flickering snow-drift, a spiral
galaxy on its side.

Inside the galaxy, coffee cups are slid over the counter, store-fronts
beg with passers-by, a crowd of shoes that leave no traces.

The climbing fire-escapes, the elevator doors gliding shut, behind
locked doors a constant swell of voices.

Sunken bodies half-sleep in the subway cars, the rushing cata-
combs.

I know, also — statistics aside — that right now Schubert is
being played in some room over there and that to someone
those sounds are more important than all those other things.

II.

The human brain’s endless expanse crumpled into the size of a
fist.

In April, the swallow returns to its last-year’s-nest under the roof
of that very barn in that very parish.

She flies from the Transvaal, passes the equator, flies for six weeks
over two continents, steers toward this disappearing point in
the land-mass.

And the man who captures the signals of a whole life in some
fairly ordinary chords by five strings

the man who makes a river run through the eye of a needle
is a fat young man from Vienna, called “Little Mushroom” by his
friends, who slept with his glasses on

and got punctually behind his writing desk each morning.

At which the wonderful centipedes of music were set in motion.

III.

The five strings play. I walk home through tepid forests with the
ground springing under me
crawl up like an unborn, fall asleep, roll weightless into the future,
suddenly feel that the plants have thoughts.

IV.

So much we have to trust, simply to live through our daily day
without sinking through the earth!
Trust the snow clinging to the mountain slope over the village.
Trust the promises of silence and smiles of understanding,
trust that the accident telegram isn't for us and that the sudden
axe-blow from within won't come.
Trust the wheel-axles that carry us on the highway in the middle
of the three-hundred-times magnified bee swarm of steel.
But none of that is really worth our confidence.
The five strings say we can trust something else.
Trust what? Something else, and they follow us part of the way
there.
As when the lights turn off in the stair-well and the hand follows
— with confidence — the blind handrail that finds its way in
the dark.

V.

We crowd in front of the piano and play four-handed in F-minor,
two coachmen on the same carriage, it looks slightly ridicu-
lous.
Our hands seem to move clanging weights back and forth, as if
we were touching the counter-weights
in attempt at disturbing the terrible balance of the great scales:
joy and suffering weigh exactly the same.
Annie said, “This music is so heroic,” and it's true.
But those who glance enviously at the men of action, those who
secretely despise themselves for not being murderers
they don't recognise themselves here.
And those many who buy and sell people and think that everyone
can be bought, they don't recognise themselves here.

Not their music. The long melody that remains itself through all
changes, sometimes glittering and weak, sometimes rough and
strong, snail-trails and steel wire.

The insistant humming that follows us right now
up the
depths.